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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 005285

LONDON FOR TUELLER
PARIS FOR ALLEGGRONE

E.O.12356: DECL: 12/4/05
TAGS: PGOV PREL GCC SA
SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA: A "FATIGUED" KING FAHD STILL OUT
OF PUBLIC VIEW; CROWN PRINCE ATTENDS GCC SUMMIT

REF: A. RIYADH 5250 AND PREVIOUS, B. DOHA 2698 (NOTAL)

¶1. CLASSIFIED BY DCM THEODORE KATTOUF - 1.5 B,D.

SUMMARY

¶2. (C) ACCORDING TO PRINCE BANDAR BIN SULTAN, KING FAHD IS EXPECTED TO MAKE A COMPLETE RECOVERY FROM THE MILD STROKE HE SUFFERED NOVEMBER 30. HOSPITAL SOURCES REPORT THE KING IS ANTICIPATED TO CHECK OUT FROM THE HOSPITAL ON DECEMBER 7. A ROYAL COURT STATEMENT, ISSUED ON DECEMBER 3, ATTRIBUTED THE KING'S HOSPITAL ADMITTANCE TO WORK RELATED FATIGUE, BUT ADMITTED TO THE PRESENCE OF A SPECIAL TEAM OF AMERICAN MEDICAL EXPERTS. HOWEVER, THE PUBLIC BAROMETER OF THE KING'S HEALTH IS WHETHER AND WHEN HE APPEARS ON TELEVISION. THIS APPEARANCE, PREDICTED BY MINDEF SULTAN TO OCCUR ON DECEMBER 3, DID NOT TAKE PLACE. CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH IS ATTENDING THE GCC SUMMIT IN THE KING'S STEAD BUT, GIVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS ATTENDANCE, IS NOT ANTICIPATED TO ADVANCE ANY SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVES. END SUMMARY

ROYAL COURT ATTRIBUTES COLLAPSE TO FATIGUE

¶3. (U) A STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE ROYAL COURT, MID-DAY DECEMBER 3, QUOTES AN ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE KING FAYSAL SPECIALIST HOSPITAL THAT KING FAHD'S HEALTH IS "REASSURING AND DOES NOT CALL FOR CONCERN." THE HOSPITAL RELEASE ATTRIBUTED THE "SUDDEN HEALTH PROBLEM" WHICH AFFLICTED THE KING TO THE "PRESSURES OF WORK AND TO ENSUING FATIGUE." CONSEQUENTLY, THE DOCTORS, INCLUDING A MEDICAL TEAM FLOWN IN FROM THE U.S. TO PERFORM ADDITIONAL TESTS, HAVE PRESCRIBED "REST AND RECUPERATION."

¶4. (C) WHILE OBSCURING THE FACT THAT THE KING SUFFERED FROM A TRANSIENT ISCHEMIC ATTACK OR A MILD STROKE, THE ROYAL COURT'S STATEMENT IS DISTINGUISHED BY THE CANDOR IN WHICH IT ADMITS THE ARRIVAL OF A TEAM OF AMERICAN MEDICAL EXPERTS. THE SAUDI PUBLIC, TAKING NOTE OF THE DELUGE OF CABLES FROM WORLD LEADERS WISHING THE KING GOOD HEALTH AND THE ADMISSION THAT FOREIGN EXPERTS WERE CONSULTED, ARE AWARE THAT THE KING WAS ADMITTED FOR SOMETHING OTHER THAN "ROUTINE MEDICAL EXAMS." HOWEVER, THE THREE STATEMENTS ISSUED TO DATE BY THE ROYAL COURT HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE IN SILENCING MORE DIRE SPECULATIONS.

PRINCE BANDAR ON UNCLE'S RECOVERY

¶5. (C) IN A LATE EVENING DISCUSSION ON DECEMBER 2, PRINCE BANDAR BIN SULTAN (WHO ACCOMPANIED THE AMERICAN MEDICAL TEAM TO RIYADH) ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR THAT KING FAHD WOULD MAKE A COMPLETE RECOVERY. HE PREDICTED THAT THE KING WOULD REMAIN IN THE HOSPITAL FOR 5-10 DAYS. THE MEDICAL TEAM WAS TO DECIDE ON A COURSE OF TREATMENT FOR THE KING ON DECEMBER 3. IN THE MEANTIME, THE KING IS SITTING UP, EATING, AND CONVERSING WITH FAMILY MEMBERS. ("AL HAYAT" ON DECEMBER 4 REPORTED THAT THE KING HELD A DINNER MEETING WITH FAMILY MEMBERS ON DECEMBER 3.) THE BIGGEST IMPEDIMENT TO THE KING'S RECUPERATION, ACCORDING TO BANDAR, ARE THE THrong OF FAMILY MEMBERS HOVERING IN AND AROUND THE KING'S SUITE. BANDAR BLAMED THE KING, WHO PERIODICALLY ASKS WHERE A PARTICULAR MEMBER OF THE FAMILY IS, FOR EXACERBATING THE THE AL SAUD'S INSTINCT TO GATHER ROUND IN TIMES OF FAMILY CRISIS.

KING'S HEALTH: DELAYED TV APPEARANCE, CHECK-OUT DATE

¶6. (C) CONFUSION AS TO WHEN THE KING WILL APPEAR ON TELEVISION TO DEMONSTRATE HIS RECOVERY HAS RESULTED IN AMBIGUITY REGARDING HIS REAL HEALTH STATUS. ON DECEMBER 3, MINDEF SULTAN TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE HAD MOVED UP HIS APPOINTMENT FROM 1330 TO 1100 IN ORDER TO BE ON HAND FOR A TELEVISION CREW'S FILMING OF THE KING FOR THE BROADCAST THAT NIGHT. NO SUCH BROADCAST OCCURRED. FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD AL FAYSAL WAS QUOTED IN THE DECEMBER 4 "AL HAYAT" AS SAYING THAT KING FAHD WOULD APPEAR ON TELEVISION TO DISCUSS HIS HEALTH WITH THE SAUDI PEOPLE. CLEARLY, THE TELEVISION APPEARANCE HAS BECOME A DE FACTO BAROMETER OF THE KING'S TRUE STANDING.

¶7. (C) THERE IS NO INFORMATION EMANATING FROM CONTACTS AT THE KING FAYSAL HOSPITAL TO SUGGEST THAT THE KING IS "COUNTING HIS LAST HOURS" (REFTEL B). TO THE CONTRARY, THE KING REPORTEDLY IS SCHEDULED TO LEAVE THE HOSPITAL THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7. THE DCM, WHO WAS AT THE HOSPITAL ON DECEMBER 4, SAW NO UNUSUAL ACTIVITY. ONE DOCTOR, WHO IS NOT ON FAHD'S MEDICAL TEAM, CLAIMED THE KING WAS "DOING FINE." THE DELAY IN THE TELEVISION APPEARANCE MAY BE A FUNCTION OF RECTIFYING THE IMAGE OF A FATIGUED MONARCH. ACCORDING TO ONE HOSPITAL SOURCE, WHEN THE KING ARRIVED AT THE HOSPITAL HE WAS SUFFERING PARALYSIS TO THE LEFT SIDE OF HIS FACE; ALTHOUGH THE CONDITION QUICKLY PASSED, THERE MAY BE SOME RESIDUAL SAGGING OF THE FACIAL MUSCLES. THE FACT THAT THE KING'S PRIVATE SECRETARY LEVELLED WITH THE AMBASSADOR AS TO THE KING'S HEALTH STATUS ON THE DAY OF HIS ADMITTANCE TO THE HOSPITAL, POST IS CONFIDENT ANY DRAMATIC CHANGE IN THE KING'S HEALTH WOULD BE REVEALED TO US.

COMMENT: GCC SUMMIT ON BACK BURNER

¶8. (C) AS NOTED BY THE DEPUTY COMMANDER OF THE NATIONAL GUARD, ABD AL-AZIZ AL-TUWAIJRI, ON DECEMBER 2, THE CROWN PRINCE WAS DISPATCHED TO MUSCAT TO ATTEND THE GCC SUMMIT IN KING FAHD'S STEAD. GIVEN THE KING'S PRE-STROKE RELUCTANCE TO ATTEND THE CONFERENCE, PURPORTEDLY OUT OF PIQUE OVER HIS FAILED INITIATIVE TO SPEARHEAD THE RESOLUTION OF INTRA-GCC BORDER DISPUTES, WE PRESUME THAT SAG ENGAGEMENT AT THE CONFERENCE WILL BE PERFUNCTORY.